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Tabloid tycoon Maxwell dies mysteriously at sea

The Associated Press

TENERIFE, Canary Islands — The death of Robert Maxwell, the tabloid tycoon whose nude body was found floating near his $21 million yacht, is as intriguing as the story of the troubled empire he ran with hands-on tenacity.

The brash, rotund 68-year-old publisher, who died Tuesday, had skipped an appearance a day earlier because he reportedly took ill.

An autopsy was expected today in Tenerife, off the Moroccan coast. Authorities questioned the crew of the yacht and Angel Delgado, the island's civil governor, was personally coordinating the investigation.

Spanish national radio said Maxwell's body was found unclothed and showed no signs of violence. Maxwell was last seen before dawn Tuesday on the yacht, 14 hours before a rescue helicopter pulled his body out of the sea.

Maxwell's Mirror Group Newspapers said the 180-foot vessel was cruising when Maxwell was last seen, walking on its deck.

It said in a statement that he had been the vessel's only passenger, in addition to about a dozen crew members. The publisher was said to be taking a few days off from his hectic work schedule.

The Daily Mirror of London, Maxwell's flagship newspaper, said he had dinner alone in a restaurant on Tenerife then reboarded the yacht and instructed his crew to cruise all night at sea.

His mysterious death comes as the $2 billion global publishing empire he personally ran, which includes the *New York Daily News*, is burdened with debt.

Maxwell had been selling assets to raise money to meet a $750 million payment due in October 1992.

In addition, Maxwell had political troubles. He was suing American journalist Seymour Hersh for alleging in a new book that he had ties to Israel's Mossad spy agency.

Two of his sons, both in their 30s, assumed the helm Tuesday and pledged to run the empire with the same zeal as their father.

In London, Charles Wilson, director of the Mirror Group, said there had been no suggestion of foul play in the death: "We can only assume that Mr. Maxwell slipped and fell overboard."

Wilson also ruled out suicide, saying: "He had too much of the arrogance of his own ability to conceive of such a thing."

Maxwell was a big man with a powerful basso voice who browbeat his editors, fought a titanic running battle with rival publisher Rupert Murdoch, and jetted about the world visiting presidents and prime ministers.

"My primary duty is to hire and fire editors," he said recently.

Born Labji Hoch to Jewish peasants in Czechoslovakia, Maxwell lost his parents in the Nazi Holocaust and escaped to Britain in 1940. He was a highly decorated World War II veteran.

Maxwell had in recent years been deepening his business and charity works in Israel, buying its second biggest newspaper and launching a Russian-language weekly for Soviet Jewish immigrants.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir mourned the loss of "a passionate friend of Israel."

"He was larger than life," British Conservative Party lawmaker Anthony Beaumont-Dark said of Maxwell. "He was the Citizen Kane of his time. If you wrote a film about his life it would be rejected as unrealistic."

His death raised questions about the future of his holdings. In addition to the *New York Daily News*, which he rescued from the brink of collapse in March, Maxwell owns several British tabloids and The European, an English-language weekly he founded in May 1990.

The boards of Maxwell's companies named Maxwell's son Kevin, 32, as acting chairman of Maxwell Communications, and son Ian, 35, as acting chairman of the Mirror Group. The sons have long worked in the family business.

This year, Maxwell sold 49 percent of the Mirror Group of newspapers in a public offering and his Pergamon Press publishing house to a Dutch company. He also sold part of his U.S. publishing house, Macmillan, to a British publisher.

Maxwell's oldest son, Phillip, flew to the Canary Islands with Maxwell's widow, Elizabeth, to identify the body.

The yacht's captain, Gus Rankin, said Maxwell wanted "to cruise all night out at sea."

The Associated Press

The front page of today's edition of the Daily Mirror, the national British newspaper, reports the death of Robert Maxwell. The publishing magnate, who counted the Daily Mirror among his many media holdings, was found dead at sea off the Canary Islands on Tuesday.

Hersh says he knows more secrets about Maxwell

The Associated Press

LONDON — American journalist Seymour Hersh, sued by Robert Maxwell for linking him to Israel's Mossad spy agency, says the real story of the British media magnate has yet to be told.

"I do know much more about him than I wrote," Hersh said in a television interview Tuesday after Maxwell's body was found off the Canary Islands, where he had been on his yacht.

"I think the real story about Maxwell is going to be the stuff of newspapers and thrillers for years," said Hersh.

> "I do know much more about him than I wrote."
>
> — Seymour Hersh

Hersh wrote in his book "The Samson Option," released last month, that Maxwell had close ties to the Mossad and that the foreign editor of his flagship newspaper, the *Daily Mirror* was involved in arms deals.

"I just hope there is a full investigation into his death, and a parliamentary investigation, into the circumstances of what he was doing with the Israelis," Hersh said in a telephone interview.

Spanish national radio said the body showed no sign of violence. An autopsy was scheduled for Wednesday.

Maxwell had vehemently denied the allegations in Hersh's books, and his newspapers mounted a vigorous defense.

Foreign Editor Nicholas Davies also denied the allegations, but was fired for falsely denying that he had been in Ohio in the spring of 1985, when Hersh said he met with a former arms dealer, Charles Benjamin Kauffman.

Maxwell sued Hersh and his publisher, who countersued.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist said he had been conservative in his revelations about the affairs of Maxwell.

"I guess I am not betraying any wild secret when I say that I and my publisher ... had been discussing just how to make some of the other information that we had accumulated public," Hersh said.

Hersh said only a portion of Maxwell's business dealings had been public.

"What percent are we at in knowledge? You add up what Maxwell was doing behind the various companies and its maze of banking activities and we're really at a very small percentage, less than 10 percent for sure is known about what he's been doing."

Bush bound for Europe but shelves Far West trip

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Bush is carrying on with plans to visit Europe for a NATO summit but is shelving a long trip to Asia and Australia amid criticism that he travels too much overseas and ignores problems at home.

The president was flying to Rome today for the meeting with fellow leaders of the Western alliance.

The surprise change in Bush's travel schedule came as Democrats twitted the president for visiting more than 30 countries, and polls found that most Americans want him to devote more time to domestic affairs.

"While a recession raged and millions of Americans were out of work, our president was out globe-trotting on his 'Anywhere but America tour,'" Rep. Vic Fazio, D-Calif., said in a speech on the House floor Tuesday.

Fazio, chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, held aloft a T-shirt reading, "George Bush went to Rome and all I got was this lousy recession."

"How can he find solutions to the problems of America's children in Rome," Fazio asked.

The White House announced Tuesday that Bush was putting on hold a 10-day journey to Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Australia that was to have started the day before Thanksgiving. The trip was to have concluded in Honolulu on Dec. 7 at a ceremony marking the 50th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

"Everything about this trip would be out," Fitzwater said, although a later White House announcement failed to mention Hawaii. The spokesman said the administration would try to reschedule the trip but could not say when that might be.

Fitzwater said the president wants to stay in Washington in case Congress takes up legislation to spur the economy or extend unemployment benefits for the long-term jobless. However, congressional leaders have expressed hopes of finishing work by Thanksgiving, which is when Bush would have left.

"It was a no-win situation," said one administration official who requested anonymity. "The host countries were not happy because the trip was being shortened, and there is plenty to do here at home. It seemed that the trip should be made at a more auspicious time."

In Australia, an aide to Prime Minister Bob Hawke said Hawke was disappointed.

"Of course we regret the postponement," the official said today. "But the prime minister fully understands that the pressures of domestic events can necessitate changes to travel plans."

Bush has been smarting over Democrats' attacks on his travel. After returning from Madrid and the opening of the Middle East peace conference, he said he was surprised to see himself criticized for making the trip.

"I could not believe the smallbore nature of that partisan criticism," the president told a political fund-raising dinner in Texas last week. "I have a responsibility to lead and I'm not going to let Democratic, liberal carping keep me from leading."

Secretary of State James A. Baker III defended Bush's travel during a White House briefing on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization summit.

"The Constitution obligates the president — in fact makes it his duty and responsibility to the American people — to deal with the national security of the United States and particularly the foreign policy of the United States," Baker said.

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S. African strike ends; unions keep threat alive

The Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa — Millions of blacks streamed back to work today after a two-day strike but union leaders threatened further action unless they get a voice in government policy.

The center of Johannesburg and other cities returned to normal with streets full of people heading for work.

Trains and buses were full after being virtually empty for two days.

The strike was aimed at a new tax system, but anti-apartheid organizers used it to rally opposition to government policies in one of the biggest shows of black political power in recent years.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions, which called the strike, said it would mount further protests unless the white government consulted it on next years's national budget.

"Those in government who are most resistant to these public pressures will have to assume full responsibility for any further mass actions necessary to make the voice of the majority heard," said the congress' leader, Jay Naidoo.

President F.W. de Klerk has scrapped apartheid laws, but has so far not shared political power with the black majority.

Violence today and overnight left six people dead, including two African National Congress officials.

The ANC officials, who were not immediately identified, were shot in the black township of Alexandra outside Johannesburg, police said.

The ANC backed the strike, but it was not clear if the shooting was related to the protest.

Police said today that four other people died in political violence overnight in various parts of the country, but it was not clear if the killings were linked to the strike.

At least 23 people died in violence linked to the two-day strike.

Naidoo said about 3.5 million people stayed off the job both days. The figures could not be confirmed, but the South African Chamber of Business said between 50 and 100 percent of the black work force was absent.

The country has 30 million blacks and about 5 million whites.

The government estimated the strike cost the country $800 million.

But business representatives said lost production would be made up.

The catalyst for the strike was the introduction a month ago of the Value Added Tax to replace a general sales tax.

Union leaders said the government had no right to introduce a tax without consulting the opposition.

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World Briefs

Moscow to ration food, necessities

MOSCOW — The Moscow City Council has decided to ration bread, meat, butter and other basics in this capital where necessities are getting harder to find and panic-buying is on the rise.

The council made the decision Tuesday and it will take effect in December, said Sergei Stupar, a spokesman for Moscow Mayor Gavriil Popov.

Stupar declined to elaborate further on the system.

Panic-buying has swept the capital's poorly stocked stores in recent days as Muscovites stock up in anticipation of sharply increasing prices.

The introduction of a rationing coupon system is an attempt by Popov to try to ensure supplies of basic goods, although previous rationing attempts have failed miserably.

Paper: Police tortured suspects

HONG KONG — A leading Chinese-language newspaper reported today that Hong Kong's police force has regularly tortured suspects, using hammers and electric shock to extract confessions.

The mass-circulation *Oriental Daily News* based its allegations on interviews with 10 former and current police officers, none of them named.

A police spokesman declined comment on the report.

The story said the torture methods are not necessarily being used now, although it asserted that police have been torturing detainees for years.

It mentioned one beating as having occurred in May 1990 and implied that more have taken place since.

The report said police sometimes subjected people held for 48-hour questioning to various shock and strong-arm tactics to obtain information on crimes and accomplices.

Thieves tunnel way to millions

BOGOTA, Colombia — Thieves made off with millions of dollars in jewels and cash after breaking into a bank through a 60-foot tunnel they dug and equipped with lights and telephones, bank officials say.

The air-conditioned tunnel, bolstered by wooden walls, was begun inside a cafeteria near the center of downtown Bogota and surfaced underneath the safety deposit boxes in the state-owned Caja Agraria bank, police said.

Law enforcement authorities discovered the robbery on Tuesday.

Ex-Venezuelan leader is blamed

CARACAS, Venezuela — The Senate has voted to hold former President Jaime Lusinchi "politically responsible" for multibillion-dollar fraud purportedly committed during his 1983-88 Social Democratic administration.

In a 60-page statement, Lusinchi was accused of a long list of irregularities that included bribery, human rights violations, letting off drug traffickers and driving the nation's economy into the ground.

Former finance ministers Manuel Azpurua, Hector Hurtado and Haydee Iturbe de Blanco were also declared "responsible."

Pravda closes Tokyo office

TOKYO — Pravda, former official newspaper of the Soviet Communist Party, is closing its 34-year-old office in Japan because of financial difficulties, its Tokyo correspondent said today.

"It's a kind of insolvency," said Igor Latyshev, explaining that a shortage of funds and Tokyo's high rents would force the office to close next month.

Word of the closure plans come a day after a report by the Interfax news agency that the Soviet Union may not have enough hard currency to meet its foreign debt payment for November.

The Associated Press

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